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Culture of collaboration: professional learning communities and collaborative coaching

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CULTURE OF COLLABORATION: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND COGNITIVE COACHING

by
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Dedications

I dedicate this paper to my wonderful parents, Michael and Danette Cemeno, as well as my remarkable husband and daughter, Charles F. Power and Juliet Rae.

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I would like to thank the people in my life who have made this journey possible. To my husband, Charles AKA Editor-in-Chief; Your support and love were pivotal to my success in completing this program. I am so grateful to have you in my life.

To my daughter, Juliet; you are my inspiration to better myself. I am sorry for the long nights in which I could not give you my full attention. I love you. I love you. I love you.

Thank you to my Mom and Dad for always supporting me no matter what. I am so very appreciative.

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Abstract

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CULTURE OF COLLABORATION: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND COGNITIVE COACHING
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What effect does cognitive coaching have on the work of a professional learning community? Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in my district can be unfocused and unproductive. This may be due to the lack of collaboration and a culture of isolation among staff within the district. Self-reflection in the form of Cognitive Coaching may be one way to encourage colleagues to become more collaborative. If a culture of collaboration and support develops, this may have an effect on PLC meetings.

The research portion of this study was conducted over a span of approximately six weeks. Methods for conducting this study included utilizing participant surveys, conducting three completed rounds of coaching (a preconference, lesson observation, and a post-conference.), observations during Professional Learning Community meetings, and the use of teacher reflection journals throughout the process.

The results of this research showed overall positive changes in regard to study participants. I found that this study benefited the participants and the school by motivating staff members to become more reflective thinkers in order to change instructional practices, made participants more aware of the need for change in regard to PLC meetings and staff planning time, and began building confidence and trust.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

Purpose Statement

As recently as four years ago, my school district's literacy programs looked very different as compared to current programs. We were still using a basal reading curriculum as our primary source of instructional materials and our guide for teaching reading and writing. Teachers in my district opened the basal and shut their doors. We all followed the same instructions that were written in the teachers' manual. There was no need for collaboration or a discussion of student progress in specific areas of instruction. Reflecting back, I can almost pinpoint the moment in which the proverbial light bulb illuminated. From that moment on, I knew that change had to happen.

I have been a member of our district's language arts committee for as long as I can remember. I and two of my colleagues, who were equally invested in change, would always vent our frustrations about ways to alter our literacy curriculum situation. During a particularly frustrating meeting, my friends and I exchanged glances. We collectively knew that we had enough. Our current practices were outdated, uninspired, and worst of all, not providing our students with the instruction they needed to become successful, lifelong learners.

After the meeting, we made it our mission to evoke a sense of urgency among administration. This was a difficult task, given that the status quo was being easily and happily maintained by many of the staff members in the district. This relieved administration from duties that would be necessary to take to task if any changes were to

be made. This sense of complacency was a huge factor in changing the culture of our district. The next year, we were very lucky to have had the opportunity to welcome a new member of administration who was open to our ideas of change.

Years later, the hard work and advocacy for change has proved fruitful in our present day curriculum. Change has happened, but it is an ongoing process. We currently have a balanced literacy approach to our curriculum. In the four years since change started, we have been engaging in new programs such as Writers Workshop, new ways to assess student learning needs, and more individualized student learning.

As our district has made its own personal changes, statewide changes were happening simultaneously. The new national Common Core Standards were introduced. This has required additional adjustments to come about. Our district also reformed their observation procedures and adopted the Danielson framework. These two introductions have led to the need to become both more collaborative and more self-reflective. As a way to integrate these, Professional Learning Communities (PLC) were introduced. PLCs have provided staff members with an increase in common planning time and a chance to become more collaborative.

Understandably, these many changes have been difficult for some staff members in the district. There are still differences in philosophical views, disagreements with administration, and some distrust in the new standards and processes. Teachers are feeling overwhelmed with new requirements. This stress seems to be overshadowing aspects of student learning and quality instruction. This important goal can get lost in the politics.

Based on these observations, I have chosen to concentrate on a way to bring staff members together, by focusing on teacher's own self-efficacy through Cognitive Coaching. I was specifically interested in how Cognitive Coaching impacts the overall culture of collaboration of the school. This will be done by looking at staff interactions during PLC meetings after coaching has been established.

Story of the Question

"I want to develop a Leadership Committee." Those were the words spoken by my Principal during a mid-July meeting. The room was quite, due to the emptiness of the school as well as the time needed by the two additional meeting members to process what our boss was stating.

"Can you clarify?" I asked with curiosity. My Principal began to describe a group of people who would volunteer to come together in order to work collaboratively and reflectively in order to meet the needs of all students. As he was speaking, I could hardly believe what I was hearing. He was describing something very similar to Cognitive Coaching.

"This is coaching! I am currently practicing this in my Clinical experience for my Reading Certification. I love it, and I have a lot of information about it..."

The other two members sat quietly until one of them broke in with hesitation, "I have some concerns…"

Many issues came up: we can't be evaluated by colleagues, no one will volunteer, and we shouldn't be telling others what to do. I did share some of my peer's trepidations;

the culture of our school is historically grounded in isolation. My excitement turned to determination mixed with inquisitiveness. I knew that this was the change that our school needed, but I wondered if coaching could be successful in my district.

After expressing my interest in developing this idea further, my principal was supportive in allowing me to take over his initiative. My clinical experiences with coaching lead me to reflect on current practices and the status quo of isolation and distrust in my district. Through this research, I am hoping to make a change. Like the many changes already in progress within my district, I know that this will not be instantaneous. In fact, it will rely on the participation of others to perpetuate the notion that collaboration is not only helpful to students but to teachers as well.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

The research question I plan to investigate is: What effect does Cognitive Coaching have on the work of a professional learning community? Collaboration is necessary in order to have productive, successful professional learning communities (PLCs). Problems can occur in some school districts when this type of cooperation is expected to occur naturally with no development or guidance of what a culture of collaboration looks like. This can lead to PLCs that are unfocused, lack participation from all members, and that are ineffective in supporting best practices.

Is there a way to increase the effectiveness of PLC meetings? Cognitive Coaching may be a way to increase the effectiveness of PLC meetings by facilitating a culture of collaboration. Research has shown that Cognitive Coaching has the potential to increase teacher efficacy and empowerment, promote best teaching practices, and create a culture

of collaboration. In preparation for this study, research expressing the effects of cognitive coaching was examined in order to determine if these components would impact the functionality of PLC meetings. The connection between benefits obtained from coaching and the work of PLC members are then explored.

If coaching can have such a positive impact on the teacher as an individual, it is very likely that those feelings and skills would carry over in more collaborative settings like a professional learning community. The hypothesis is that this carry over would lead to an increased acceptance of collaboration amongst peers and, in turn, would help to support and focus PLC meetings. All of this leads to quality instructional practices and improved student learning.

Will the collaborative culture built by coaching transfer into PLC meetings naturally? Does the specific format of the peer coaching model need to be used in order to cultivate more collaborative PLCs? Many studies were inspirational in looking closely at the effects of coaching on school culture in everyday practice. This study was inspired by the limited research found on the indirect effects of coaching on PLCs.

Organization of the Paper

Chapter two provides a review of the literature surrounding the benefits of Cognitive Coaching, the structure of professional learning communities, and teacher collaboration. Chapter three describes the design of the study. This includes the process of implementing Coaching within the school as well as pertinent information about the staff members and the context of the school district. Chapter four reviews and analyzes the data and research and discusses the findings of the study. Chapter five presents the

conclusions of this study and implications for teaching and learning as well as suggestions for further research regarding Cognitive Coaching and PLCs.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The fundamental purpose of any type of staff development is to change individuals' knowledge, understanding, behavior, skills, and even their values and beliefs (Hord, 1994). With the introduction of the new Common Core Standards, many school districts have been introduced to Professional Learning Communities, commonly referred to as PLCs. PLC meetings involve teachers in site-based, ongoing, collaborative professional development (Linder, 2012, p. 13). This Constructivist model of learning through collaboration is not new, but is gaining popularity. "The term *professional learning community (PLC)* first emerged among researchers as early as the 1960s when they offered the concept as an alternative to the isolation endemic to the teaching profession in the United States. The research began to become more explicit in the late 1980s and early 1990s" ("History of PLC," n.d., para. 1). Harvard researchers Robert Kagen and Lisa Laskow Lahey have found that changing the way we talk can change the way we work. The professional learning community concept has helped to change the conversations in schools and districts ("History of PLC," n.d., para. 12).

Professional learning communities are just one facet of professional development. Costa and Garmston expressed their earliest thoughts about cognition, teaching, and supervision in 1985. After many years of research later, Cognitive Coaching has been used by thousands of teachers, administrators and staff developers in mentoring, supervision, and professional development activities (2003, p. 1). Instructional coaching has been adopted in schools nationally to enable an increase in student achievement by

providing high-quality professional learning encounters for teachers (Heineke, 2013, p. 409).

In this research review, there are three sections that are discussed; Cognitive Coaching, Professional Learning Communities, and Teacher Collaboration. All three sections provide contextual information and data suggesting the benefits of participation in each of these practices. This information shows how each element is related to professional development and how each can be utilized in creating a collaborative culture in order to achieve student success.

Cognitive Coaching

When introducing Cognitive Coaching, Costa and Garmston (1994) present the concept of holonomy- the study of wholeness and having awareness of oneself. Coaching promotes living holonomously by activating internal resources described a "states of mind." The five states of mind include: Craftsmanship, efficacy, flexibility, consciousness, and interdependence (p. 122). The authors note that these states of mind are never fully achieved and that "the journey toward holonomy and the five states of mind is the destination." A coach has the ability to draw forth these states of mind. This is always conducted with the ultimate purpose of making important decisions about students (p. 143).

As an educator, teaching efficacy and teacher empowerment are essential tools in establishing effective practices. Edwards and Newton (1995) use qualitative and quantitative data to examine the relationship between cognitive coaching and positive behaviors believed to be brought out by Cognitive Coaching. Their study saw a clear

connection to positive impacts on teacher efficacy in the forms of: higher career satisfaction, increased motivation, more reflective practice, increased enthusiasm, the use of more effective questioning, increased team teaching, and the development of a less critical outlook (p. 20).

Other studies explore similar findings. Kise and Russell (2010) reference the benefits of a coaching culture from the point of view of teacher leaders. "A coaching culture helps to open people's minds to solutions, especially in a profession where people are so likely to isolate themselves." (p. 11).

In her book, *The Art of Coaching*, Elena Aguilar discusses what coaching can do for a school:

Coaching is an essential component of an effective professional development program. Coaching can build will, knowledge, and capacity because it can go where no other professional development has gone before: into the intellect, behaviors, practices, beliefs, values, and feelings of an educator. (2013 pg. 8)

Joyce and Showers (1996) introduced peer coaching as a division of staff development in 1980. Peer coaching "focuses on innovations in curriculum and instruction." Staff members work together in teams in order to follow a specific process leading up to peer coaching. Knowledge, theory, modeling, and practice are part of this process. Joyce and Showers (1996; 2002) have written several articles presenting results concluding that working with a peer coaching framework promotes collaborative training during staff development, greater training retention, and better application of new skills.

Garmston, Linder, and Whitaker (1993) not only discuss the process and goals of cognitive coaching, they also look closely at the experiences of two coaches: Christina Linder and Jan Whitaker. Both the pros and cons of their experience were discussed. The candid information about teacher interactions and teacher autonomy leads one to look closely at the effect of coaching on teacher efficacy. After four months of working together, both Whitaker and Linder reported becoming better thinkers and, therefore, better teachers (p. 58). As a result of their coaching experience, they were able to encourage development of other peer relationships within their districts (p. 61).

Showers and Joyce affirm that the central concern has been helping students benefit when their teachers learn, grow, and change (1996, p. 12). Aguilar states that coaching is linked to teachers' increase in using data to inform practice. "Effective coaching programs respond to particular needs suggested by data, allowing improvement efforts to target issues such as closing achievement gaps and advocating for equity." (2013, p. 9) There is also a heavy research base for effective professional development. Cooper (2009) notes the major conclusions drawn from existing evidence related to successful professional development. One such conclusion is, "In order for teachers to retain and apply new strategies, skills, and concepts, they must receive coaching while applying what they are learning" (p. 3).

In Swafford's research, there was a prevailing theme throughout the data- the benefit of peer coaching (Swafford, 1998, p. 55). One clear benefit was that coaching provided teachers with the support they needed when implementing new instructional practices. Another is that teacher change was facilitated in terms of technical expertise, feelings about effectiveness of classroom instruction, and personal reflections about

teaching and learning. The final major theme that showed within the data is that coaching provided different lenses through which teachers could view their instruction. This study acknowledges that traditional staff development is not sufficient to ensure that new ways of teaching will become norms in the classroom. Peer coaching can build a professional culture that supports teachers who are knowledgeable and responsive to all students, regardless of their needs (p. 57).

Professional Learning Communities

The ultimate goal of any educator is student success. The purpose of a professional learning community, or PLC, is to achieve increased learning and student success. Teaching quality is improved through continuous professional learning (Hord, 2009, p. 40). Hord notes that "The professional learning community models the self-initiating learner working in concert with peers" (p. 41). She also reiterates that this is a constructivist approach and quotes Vygotsky by adding, "Learning constructively requires an environment in which learners work collegially and is situated in authentic activities and contexts (p. 41).

Hord explains that PLCs require conditions for success. These conditions include: Community membership, leadership, time for learning, space for learning, data use support, and distributed leadership (p. 42). All of these components in sync then lead to the visionary goal of collaboration and student learning becoming a reality. Hord expresses how such collaborative learning is beneficial to a school community:

"Staff members, with their school leaders, are using data to make decisions about what to learn, how to learn it, how to transfer and apply it to their classrooms, and how to

assess its effectiveness. In doing so, professional learning community members operate as constructivist learners, making collegial decisions and planning self-generated learning. In addition to acting constructively in their learning, they demonstrate professional behavior- consistently increasing their effectiveness through continuous learning" (2009, p. 43).

Linder, Post, & Calabrese (2012) found three main ways for implementing successful PLCs: First, classroom teachers should not hesitate to join together to investigate topics of common interest. Second, educational administrators should consider PLCs as a viable method of professional development for their building and district personnel. Third, university faculty can help establish and sustain PLCs by placing the major decision-making in the hands of the teachers, enabling them to develop a feeling of autonomy (pg. 20). The authors of this study suggest that after a year of success, schools can then focus on ways of developing professional relationships (p. 21).

Professional learning communities look differently depending on their context and setting. Meghan Everette's article (2014) discusses different formats for PLCs and discussion topics. More importantly, she discusses the importance of collaborative norms to get the most out of the PLC experience. Three main concepts are noted- commitment, participation, and focus.

Teacher Collaboration

Individual teacher efforts have often been the focus of effectiveness for many years. Research by Poulos, Culberston, Piazza, and D'Entremont (2014) takes a look at how high-functioning schools work together to produce successful outcomes (p. 28).

They reviewed research by Amy Edmonson from the Harvard Business School finding that "organizations often thrive, or fail, based on their ability to work as teams to learn, improve, and innovate" (p. 28). Their own study findings share the importance of creating school collaboration through established structures, modeled constructive feedback, prioritized cultural fits, and provided opportunities for teacher-led collaboration (p. 29-31).

Swafford (1998) recognizes that teaching is evolutionary and that some skills acquired in the past no longer meet the diverse needs of many students today. This leaves teachers to seek out professional development in order to be successful in implementing new strategies and ideas. This article discusses the change that professional development is currently going through. It also stresses the importance of "teachers supporting teachers as they apply and reflect on new ways of teaching…" (p.54). Swafford also notes that "rather than approaching staff development from a traditional perspective, they [schools] develop staff development programs in which peer support in the form of 'coaching' is an essential component. (1998, p. 54).

The work of Joyce and Showers (2002), pioneers in "the concept of coaching as it relates to teaching," provide an example of how coaching can be used in correlation with collaborative learning conditions such as PLCs. They believe that "training needs to enable people to learn new knowledge and skills and to transfer these into their practice." Their model for professional development identifies four key components to training: Knowledge of theory, modeling, practice, and peer coaching. Their research looks at how coaching contributes to the transfer of training and found that there are five distinct benefits: More practice of new strategies, teachers adaptation of strategies more

appropriate to their own goals, retained and increased skill over time, more thorough and purposeful modeling of strategies to students, and a clearer understanding of the purposes and use of new strategies (p. 3).

Barbara Gideon (2002) lists learning communities as a way to scaffold more collaborative practices (p. 32). She stresses that collaboration will not happen automatically and in order to make collaboration the norm, it must be purposeful, planned, and structured. She them goes on to list five specific structures used to build the scaffold for successful teacher collaboration- A campus leadership team, learning communities, grade-level meetings, department meetings, and cadres- working groups (p. 32). This culminates into "teachers' voices being heard and honored." (p. 34). "Successful collaboration requires that all teachers' voices be heard and that administrators be willing to honor varying viewpoints." (p. 34).

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature associated with Cognitive Coaching, Professional Learning Communities, and teacher collaboration, it is clear that there are many benefits to coaching. It is also clear that PLCs need collaborative support in order to work to their full potential.

Considering the various ways to incorporate professional development practices within a school district, one may say that it is important to identify the most effective elements needed to produce successful, autonomous teachers. With autonomy, comes the ability to perform collaboratively. Kise and Russell (2010) quote M.S. Peck (1987) when thinking about establishing communities:

> Community does not solve the problem of pluralism by obliterating diversity. Instead it seeks out diversity, welcomes other points of view, embraces opposites, and desires to see the other side of every issue. It is 'wholistic.' It integrates us human beings into a functioning mystical body. (p. 83)

We know that forms of coaching are used as part of the process of establishing and participating in effective PLCs. The goal of this study is to look at connection between coaching and PLCs from a different angle. Can coaching outside of PLCs have an effect on the way meetings are run, feelings towards collaboration, and reflective practices? Based on the explored research, the investigators of this study believe that coaching can have this powerful effect on professional learning.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

The paradigm for this research study follows qualitative research methods. This model is commonly used by teacher researchers since they are immersed in the research setting. It allows the flexibility to be subjective- something extremely important when thinking about the dynamics of the everyday classroom or school building environment. It is grounded in "genuine questions that are truly relevant" to the needs of the staff members of any school setting, but particularly the participants from this study site. (Shagoury and Miller Power, 2012, p. 2).

Cynics of qualitative teacher research would question this methodology and "whether or not practitioners have the skills to carry out such research adequately (Huberman, 1996, as cited by Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 46). Additionally, doubters have aligned themselves with the notion of the "science critique" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 46). "Practitioner inquiry is not scientific in that it is 'idiosyncratic' to a particular context and a particular researcher and thus does not permit cross-sire generalization and application" (e.e., Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001, as cited by Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 46). However, as Shagoury and Miller (2012) suggest, "Unlike large-scale education research, teacher research has a primary purpose of helping the teacher-researcher understand and improve her practice in specific, concrete ways" (p. 4). Therefore, the central goal of teacher research is conducted with students and student achievement in mind. While teacher research requires collecting and analyzing data as well as presenting it to others with careful

attention to specific details, many educators are pleased when they realize that teacher research, by its very nature, is often "rich in classroom anecdotes and personal stories" (Shagoury and Miller, 2012, p.3).

Procedure of Study

In order to find the participants needed to help answer the research question; "What effect does Cognitive Coaching have on the work of a professional learning community?" pertinent study data was disseminated during an after school staff meeting. Enrollment in the study was open to all staff members of the school. Interested participants were asked to email me, the sub-investigator, if they would like to be a part of the study. After study members were gathered, a meeting was set up with all volunteers in order to review study purposes, procedures, and consent information.

Seven staff members volunteered to be participants of this study. One participant out of seven is male. One of the participants is a Special Education teacher and another works with students who receive Basic Skills services. The other five participants are regular education teachers in either second or third grades. Four participants have been teaching for more than ten years. Two out of the seven participants are new to the school district this year with a total of four months of experience in Waterford Township.

To begin the study, baseline data was collected in the form of staff and principal questionnaires. These questionnaires focused on feelings about collaboration, opinions about the effectiveness of professional learning community (PLC) meetings, and opinions about how to improve the effectiveness of PLCs. I also observed a PLC meeting in order to note staff behaviors during this collaborative meeting. This baseline data was used to

gain insight about the culture of collaboration within the building and how the status of this culture reflects a productive staff environment. After reviewing the data, I decided that the first step in building a culture of collaboration would be to understand the basics of coaching in order to become comfortable with working with another staff member in order to improve instruction. I then conducted a meeting after school where I explained and distributed literature about Cognitive Coaching.

The next three weeks of the study consisted of Cognitive Coaching sessions. Pre-conferences and post conferences were scheduled at a time of the participants' choice. Observations were scheduled based on the lesson requested by the participant.

During pre-conferences, I began discussions by asking an open ended question about the lesson such as "describe your lesson." The participant's response then lead to more open ended questions in order to stimulate thinking and really express a deep understanding of how and why the particular lesson is being taught. I took copious notes about our discussion. I used the notes to be able to reference and paraphrase what the participant was expressing. Our discussion leads the participant to express what the focus of the observation will be. The discussion notes were also used to develop a data collection tool to be used during the observation. After the data collection tool was created, I shared the generated document with the participant in order for them to check if what I had developed was sufficient for what they want to focus on for reflective practice. After acknowledgement, post conference times were established. I then began observations.

Observation times were chosen by participants and were based on specific needs in different areas of instruction. The data collection tool was used in order to focus in on this need. After observing, I waited at least a full day to complete post observations in order for teachers to be reflective of the observed lesson.

Post conferences began similarly to pre-conferences: by asking open-ended question to stimulate reflective thinking.

The fourth week is when the final survey was distributed. This survey linked Cognitive Coaching to PLC effectiveness. It asked participants how they could use what they experienced during coaching to help make PLC meetings more effective.

The fifth week was used to observe a second PLC meeting. The data collected from this observation will be compared to the data collected from the first PLC meeting observation. I looked at this data in order to compare collaborative behaviors from participants prior to having experience with coaching to their behavior after experiencing Cognitive Coaching.

Data Sources

A variety of qualitative research approaches were used in order to establish data for this study. To begin this study, I gathered data about staff members' perception about the effectiveness of PLC meetings. I also included data about their feelings regarding collaboration. I looked for commonalities throughout the data by color-coding and charting the information. I used this data to compare perceptions about collaboration and the effectiveness of PLCs before and after participants' Cognitive Coaching experience. Data was also collected in the form of observational notes. Pre and post

conference notes were taken in an interview format. This allowed me to look for patterns forming during coaching sessions. Patterns were identified and categorized. Observation data in the form of specific data collection was used during teacher observation sessions.

Participants were asked to keep their own reflection journal. This served two purposes: one was to perpetuate the notion of reflective practices and the other was to serve as a tool in allowing me to gain a better understanding of thoughts, feelings, and efforts involving coaching sessions and PLC meetings. I also kept a teacher research journal which allowed me to record my personal thoughts and feelings about the data collected and the process of the research study.

Data Analysis

The data collected during this study was used to draw conclusions regarding the effect of Cognitive Coaching on the culture of collaboration and the effectiveness of PLCs within the Thomas Richards School. I used the staff surveys to have a clear understanding of feeling towards collaboration and current collaborative practices in the form of PLC meetings. The principal survey provided similar information, but from the viewpoint of on 'outsider' in the form of an administrator. I believe this information was useful in understanding the principal's views on the school culture and in gaging whether or not administration would be supportive of change if needed. Teacher reflection journals were extremely supportive in interpreting participant views on the process and outcomes of their coaching experiences. Observational notes from coaching sessions were also analyzed in order to note changes in instruction and staff interactions. Reviewing the data helped me to identify common themes. These themes were then

color coded to look for patterns within different areas of the study. My own personal reflections, which were recorded in my teacher research journal, helped me to stay thoughtful throughout the study. Referencing my reflections aided me in joining the pieces of data together by connecting study practices to the observed outcomes.

Context

Community. The Thomas Richards School is one of three school buildings in the Waterford Township school district. There are a total of 10,494 people living in Waterford Township, located in Camden County, New Jersey. According to the 2000 Census, 10,494 people reside in 3,542 housing units. Of those 3,542 units, 78.8 % are family households and 39% are families with children under the age of 18. Among these households, 59.4% are married households and 4.9 % are female-led households with no husband present and children under the age of 18.

The 2000 Census describes Waterford Township's racial makeup as 92.7 % white or Caucasian, 4.2% black or African American, 2.1% Hispanic or Latino, .9% Asian, and .2% American Indian. The population by age consists of 74.3% over the age of 18 including 9.8% who are 62 and older. The median age of residents of Waterford Township is 36.1.

Waterford Township median household income as of the 2000 Census was $59,075 and the median family income was $63,693. The per capita income in dollars was $21,676. In 2000, 3.6% of families in Waterford Township were considered to be living in poverty and of these 4.8% were families with children under the age of 18.

School. According to 2012-2013 NJ School Performance Report data, The Thomas Richards School currently educates 222 students in both 2nd and 3rd grade. This school's academic performance is labeled as having "significantly lagging performance." 87.8% of the students attending Thomas Richards are white, 8.1% are Hispanic, 2.3% are two or more races, 1.4% are black students, and .5% are American Indian. 98.2% speak English, .9% speak Spanish, and .5% speak polish. 123 students are male and 99 students are female. 30.6% of the students receive Free or Reduced lunch assistance and 14% are classified as Special Education students.

Thomas Richards' teaching staff is comprised of approximately 34 people. 31 out of the 34 are female employees. 91.1% of staff members are considered Caucasian. These statistics were taken from the school district website, wtsd.org.

Climate and participants. Historically, our district's staff has followed a principle of isolation when it comes to teaching. It wasn't until very recently that administration has been holding teachers in our district accountable for engaging in best practices and adhering to guidelines set by the curriculum directors. These rapid changes have been both positive and negative in the eyes of the staff. Some staff members feel a sense of relief knowing that standards have been established and are monitored in order to increase school success. Others are seeing new initiatives as intrusive and overwhelming.

The participants in this study vary in teaching experience and age. There is only one male participant, his name is Matthew. Matthew has been teaching for a total of 14 years. He has been teaching for a total of 10 years in Waterford Township. Matthew has

held several different positions within the school district. He currently teaches second grade Basic Skills. This position requires him to instruct students using the Leveled Literacy Intervention program (LLI). This program is new to Matthew. His confidence seems low in regard to his new position; however, Matthew will actively seek out assistance in order to become more successful.

Susan is new to the Waterford Township School District. Even though she has only been teaching third grade for a few months, Susan has nine years of experience in an urban school setting. Susan seems to have made a smooth transition to her new surroundings. She is eager, confident, and innovative.

Sarah is another new hire in the district. Unlike Susan, Sarah has no certified teaching experience. She does have prior experience as an aide in a special needs classroom in a neighboring school district. Sarah teaches second grade students who are part of a self-contained classroom. Her students have a wide range of abilities and classifications. Sarah is a motivated and caring teacher. The first year for any teacher is extremely difficult. Sarah has the added challenge of meeting the extreme academic and behavioral needs of her students.

Joy has been teaching for a total of seven years. She has held positions in Kindergarten and second grade, where she is currently teaching. Joy was employed as a Special Education aide for two years before being hired as a full time teacher within the district. With the exception of Matthew, Joy has the most experience in her grade level. She holds the position of Head Teacher for her grade. This title includes responsibilities such as; leading PLC meetings, disseminating important information to grade level staff,

handling disciplinary issues in the absence of the principal, and other leadership responsibilities.

Linda's beginning experience in Waterford Township was as a Gifted and Talented teacher. After two years, she began teaching third grade. Linda has been instructing at this grade level for the past twelve years, giving her a total of 14 years in the district. She would be described as an outspoken individual. The same cannot be said for her interactions during staff meetings. Linda usually remains quiet and does not interject her thinking for academic related issues.

A recent hire, Ivy has been teaching for a total of two years- both in the Waterford Township School District. She has been a welcome addition to the school family. Ivy is a motivated learner. She has valid ideas which she freely communicates with her peers. Ivy is currently in the process of receiving her Master's degree in Reading. This shows her motivation and dedication to continuous education.

Claire has also spent her teaching career in district. She has been teaching for 11 years total with the majority of the time being spent in sixth grade. Claire has been teaching third grade for the past three years. Claire is motivated to continuously better herself as an educator. She believes in authentic practice that works to deepen student learning. Claire is comfortable speaking publicly to staff members in order to voice her opinions about current and future practices.

Chapter four discusses the results of the data collected using the various collection resources. Chapter Five then presents the conclusions and reverberations of this work as

well as recommendations for further study in relation to the topics covered in this research.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Introduction

Chapter four discusses the findings of my study, focusing on answering the question, "What effect does Cognitive Coaching have on the work of a professional learning community?" Sorting and categorizing my data sources (teacher-research journal, participant and principal surveys, observational notes, and participant reflection journals) helped me to identify key data points to report. Looking at all data sources seems to suggest three main themes that occur throughout the study. These themes include the need for professional learning community changes, change in instructional practices, and the benefits of a nonjudgmental approach.

Data Collection Throughout the Study

Chapter three explained the process for collecting data. This occurred over a four week period. During the first week, I used participant and principal questionnaires in order to gain insight of feelings about working collaboratively, the effectiveness of district PLCs, and any changes that should occur in regard to how PLCs are facilitated. The responses were coded to look for patterns in staff replies. Observational notes taken during coaching sessions allowed me to evaluate and gain insight as to the progress of reflective thinking. Observational notes were also used to record PLC information. This allowed me to look for patterns in relation to staff participation and collaboration. Participants were required to reflect in their own journals after each coaching session. They were also required to complete a final reflection. The data taken from participant

journals was coded to look for occurring themes. My own teacher research journal was used to analyze staff behaviors throughout the study in order to look for changes in collaborative and reflective behavior. During the final week, I distributed a survey in order to interrupt staff feelings towards Cognitive Coaching, thoughts on using coaching to increase PLC effectiveness, and what interest staff has in continuing coaching practices.

A Need for Professional Learning Community Changes

I began my study by administering a survey to the participants as well as the principal of the school. This survey included five questions focusing on the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities, preferences about working collaboratively or individually, and views on staff participation during PLCs. When asked, *"Do you prefer to work collaboratively or on your own when it comes to school activities/tasks and Why?"* five out of seven participants reported that they prefer to work collaboratively. Responses were similar in the explanation of the preference to work collaboratively in order to share ideas. The only two participants to express a preference to work alone were Matthew and Susan.

In Matthew's survey he wrote: "I prefer working alone, but I understand the effectiveness of a team working together and respect the elements of good teamwork. When great minds can work together, a lot can be achieved."

Susan added: "While I prefer to work alone, logically I know collaboratively is more effective. I benefit more from pushing towards collaboration."

I appreciate Matthew's and Susan's honesty. Even though they both expressed a preference in working alone, they are not opposed to participating in collaborative ventures. This is evident through their willingness to volunteer for this research study. Their feelings seem to stem from having more introverted personalities and not from a place of opposition.

The second question on the survey asked for a rating of the effectiveness of our PLCs with an explanation of their rating. The average rating is a 5.6 out of 10. Joy was the only staff member to rate the effectiveness of our PLCs as a 10. All other participants believe that PLCs are not as effective as they could be.

Linda explains, "At this point, PLC meetings have not been productive. We are typically given a task to complete. I believe that PLC time should be a time in which grade levels can communicate and plan so there is continuity for their students."

Ivy has similar feelings: "PLC meetings are not as effective as they could be. I don't think that they are authentic or that we work collaboratively."

Susan feels that PLCs are not effective because they are so infrequent. Sarah commented that some topics don't pertain to her needs. Matthew has noticed that PLCs can tend to become a "gripe fest".

Two additional questions on the survey looked at the changes needed for PLCs to be more effective. *"If you believe that meeting should change, what can be done to make them more effective?"* and *"Do you believe that our PLC meetings follow PLC norms? Why or why not?"* showed very similar thinking among the majority of participants yet again. Linda and Claire expressed a desire to have PLCs be more teacher-driven.

Linda: “There should be more teacher input as to the needs that must be addressed.”

Claire: ”...more teacher driven, more analyzing of data, more goal setting, and using data to plan future instruction.”

All staff members, except for Joy and Sarah, responded that they do not believe PLCs follow PLC norms. Joy noted that “...they are moving in the right direction. They are more teacher driven and apply to our needs.” Sarah is a new teacher and admits that she does not have much experience with PLCs. “I am unfamiliar with PLC norms; however, when I Googled it, it seemed as though it does follow the norms.” Others expressed a concern for the way our district’s PLC meetings are handled. Claire brings up an important point, “”I feel we need to meet more regularly as a team to collaborate, plan, communicate, analyze, and reflect.” There is a similar sentiment noted by Ivy in her teacher research journal in reference to her coaching experience overall. “If we had common planning time, it would provide the time needed for a successful coaching program. I also think that it would enhance PLC meetings and the content of the meetings.”

When asked, *“Do you feel that all staff members participate equally during meetings?”* The majority of the participants stated “no.” Linda feels that some staff members are intimidated by others and she believes this is why some people remain quiet. She also feels that only certain ideas are “praised” and if anyone has an idea which is different, they tend to not feel comfortable enough expressing it to the group.

Mr. Jackson is the building Principal. As noted previously, Mr. Jackson was asked to complete the Principal Survey during the first week of the study. His responses were very interesting to review. His survey was very similar to the other participant surveys and his responses mirrored the majority of the staff responses. He rates the effectiveness of PLC meetings as a five out of 10. He explains, "The staff work well together as a team, but I feel as though the principal has too much involvement." He admits that in order for effective change to happen, "Teachers need comprehensive training. The meetings should be driven and led by teaching staff members." He does not believe that our meetings follow PLC norms because of the heavy reliance on administrative involvement and that lack of teacher driven directives. He also believes that not all staff members participate equally. Mr. Jackson states "...we need to work harder on listening to each other and developing more trust among each other in order to move PLCs forward."

Changes in Instructional Practice

One thing that stood out as I reviewed the data was that the participants were changing their instructional practice through self-reflective behavior. This was visible through the notes taken during conferencing sessions with participants. Coaching notes revealed the progression that participants made during the study. All staff members showed a definite progression in their reflective behavior and showed a change in teaching practice.

This progress is subject to gradation depending on the participant. Even though all participants changed in positive ways, some participants showed more growth than

others. Matthew's experience is an example of someone who showed great change throughout this process. He began coaching sessions with a concern about keeping a specific reading group on task. He discussed that one student in particular was very distracted and it was difficult to meet her intense reading needs because of this distracted behavior. Matthew wanted me to take data on the student behaviors and his interactions with these students to see if there was a pattern. Figure 1 shows a sample of the data chart used to record what was observed during the lesson.

Table 1

Round One Data Collection for Matthew

Observation 1 Data Collection	Student A	Student K
Off task	Fluency + • looking around • trying to move ahead pattern review • playing w materials • put materials out, but didn't start working • focused when others were reading New Story + - RTS + Inferences + Wrap up +	Fluency + Not reading along Pattern review -playing w materials • completed work New Story + RTS - Inferences + Wrap up +

Observation 1 Data Collection	Student A	Student K
Observation	On task, in the story. Need redirection to begin reading Feet up, seems to be copying Kaitlyn Talking Talking to K Calling out **pattern review** Difficulty sorting, looking at others to check Asked question when stuck Requires a lot of prompting to solve words	On task, in story Kaitlyn and Ashley arguing over fact Feet up Calling out Talking over teacher Talking to A Calling out **pattern review** stands up, fidgets took pen "I want to write it"
Observation	Repeated "I know, I know…." New Story Not focused on text to answer the question Continued to clap after activity was over playing w book Reading aloud w/ teacher- focused on story. Reads loudly On own- focused on story Finished book- Watching K **Inference** Sitting up on chair, but listening Wrap up	New Story Not focused on the text to answer the question Reading to self- distracted by A's reading, looking around the room Commenting on A's reading Talking to B Reading w/ teacher- focused on story Rest of the group is quiet and focused! Interrupted instruction, walking around, not reading. Distracting A Grabbed book out of A's hand. **Inference** Telling A what to do Wrap up
Teacher Interaction	Says name to directly address teach quietly kept page down Ignored **pattern review** called on to answer Addressed student prompt to begin working- student started working Assisted student with solving Ignored behavior New story Prompt to check text. Ignored physically put book down prompted to get a new book	redirect w/ verbal and gestural prompt, student complied Ignored **Pattern review** Called on to answer Ignored Verbal prompt to sit correctly- 3 times New Story Ignored behavior Ignored behavior

During our first post conference, Matthew was able to interpret the data and reflect on his teaching practice.

Matthew: “I ignored the behavior too much.”

Me: Do you see this as something positive or negative?

Matthew: “Negative. I’m trying to focus on the lesson, trying not to stop.”

Me: “Has that been successful?”

Matthew: “At times, when I’m not working with students where it’s happening so frequently.”

Me: “What do you see as positives with the lesson?”

Matthew: “When the students were on task, they were independently using their strategies.”

Me: “What do you think you can do to help with the off task behaviors?”

Matthew: “Not ignore behaviors. K is an attention vacuum. She has a lot of needs.”

Me: “You mention K’s need for constant attention. Is there a way that K could get the attention she wants and not distract others?

Matthew: “Yeah, She needs appropriate attention- I think I can divide my time up more equally. I also think I need to encourage more hand-raising so that she can’t monopolize the group time. I think she might need consistent positive praise.”

Matthew was able to reflect on the data he received in order to pinpoint what is working and what isn't. His preconference evolved into me looking at more of his behavior rather than the students. He wanted to focus on the same two students; however, he really wanted to know whether or not he was ignoring behaviors and the outcome of not ignoring. See figure 2 for the round two observation data chart.

Table 2

Round Two Data Collection for Matthew

Observation 2 Data Collection- Antecedent/ student	Teacher response- Ignored behavior? Y or N	Student Outcome/Respond
open to next page	GP	+
write words quickly		+
use book- "I don't have the book"	N	+
sitting up	N, sit the right way	+
To each student- A- What did you learn about dinosaurs? K- "A took it! I need the book!	N- let's think of a new one N- try it, stretch it out	+ + +
helping another student		+
K- read it to me others read		• w/ positive reinforcement • K listened quietly
tape all over	N- explained how it was cleaned	short convo
P to sit	N	+
asking story questions		+
K calling out	N- "A and B, excellent"	• stopped
what do we notice about the sounds	P for corrections	• good participation
read together K- wreck table	 N	+
Slick?	y	K- call out
sit on bottom	N	+
white boards w magnets K- grabbing, calling out calling out	Y Y	Continued to call out
good job Kaitlyn		+
K- calling out	N	stopped calling out
working with one student	y	others having convo about words
trading letters- K- hey! silly w/ magnets	 Y N	 talking +
others make a new words K-do I have to?	N	+

Observation 2 Data Collection- Antecedent/ student	Teacher response- Ignored behavior? Y or N	Student Outcome/Respond
Fantastic- points? Silly- took someone's seat	Y	+ distracted by new book- "we read this"
K you are crazy today	Y	talkative, calling out
teacher question	Y	K- calling out, no think time, answers to answer
K reading aloud	Y N	continued stopped
K- calling out	Y	continued to talk/call out
turn page		+
Teacher Question	Y	talking over teacher, but correctly answered
Teacher questions? called on K specifically B answered	N- GP for k	+
K only one who turned the page	N	+
going to the end	N- asked not to	went to the end, told everyone the ending, Ignored
reviewed rules, and checks K bragging	N- don't brag	• stopped behavior
Listening in to individual students read		+

During our post conference, Matthew described how happy he was with the new techniques he decided to try in order to improve the on task behavior in his group.

Matthew: "In comparison to the last lesson, I felt like I was keeping an eye on K more. I felt like I was trying less to ignore things. It may be uncomfortable, but I called out K when she needed it."

Me: "What are some things that you changed in order to meet K's needs?"

Matthew: "I introduced a points system and praised her for working hard. I gave her positive attention."

Me: "What have you noticed since introducing these changes?"

Matthew: “I realize that there are certain behaviors that I can ignore and others that I can’t. I also tried to pull back on my own silliness because I think that may have been part of the problem.”

Me: “Is there anything that you will expand upon?”

Matthew: “I will keep working specifically with K. I also think that I need to separate her from another student (A). I believe that her presence is affecting her. She takes control of the situation.”

Me: “Is there a way to play off of that control?”

Mathew: “I think I can give her more responsibility. That would work. I am happy that you can observe and then meet again. It’s helpful to have a follow up and not just a onetime discussion.”

Matthew is really taking control of deciding how to alter his teaching behaviors in order to find success with his students. Our final coaching round was set up very similar to the second. Figure 3 shows the data taken during this observation.

Table 3

Round Three Data Collection for Matthew

Observation 2 Data Collection- Teacher Direction/ Antecedent	Teacher Response Ignored behavior? Y/N	Student response/outcome
which vowel makes the sound?		what?
showing short sounds	Y	calling out
word attack-		following along

Observation 2 Data Collection- Teacher Direction/ Antecedent	Teacher Response Ignored behavior? Y/N	Student response/outcome
take words out gave out dojo points		+ +
k calling out T- working w other student, k called out • asked her to wait GP?	n y n	remained on task called name • went back to work
working w/ other student- checked in w/ K	n	• remained on task
checking in w/ others K- read words, assisted w sort/words	N N	• remained on task • participated
clean up- telling story about ipad	n	• followed directions
new story- K only one w/ book open compared liz/kim books K- whats a play date?	y n	 +
turn to page 2- K "done!"	n	+
k are you on pages 8/9? I can't see your book	n	• put book down
read w/ B. Whisper read. book on the table	n	• followed directions
working with other students	glancing over to check in	• continued to read quietly
listened to k read- prompt for fluent reading praise praise good modeled fluency worked together checking in on others at the same time	n	+ + + + + +
"Ashley is still reading" "Ashley's on the first page?!"	n y	+ +
Writing about reading- what was your favorite part of the story? Comp questions K, are you going to write about the game? tell me what you are going to write?	 N	• student responses
"no she can't!" yes she can "Why? it's not impacting you, write your own thing	n N	- • continued working
pencil broke directed to put it in the jar upside down this one isn't broken fixed it, moved on- gave instructions a bit louder	n n	+ continued to work
read what you wrote	N	+
tossed materials T- please don't throw things at me picked it up, "laughing, I didn't."	N	
asking why she had to leave and the others could to stay	N	left questioning- didn't like being the only one to leave

This was our interaction during the post-conference:

Me: “Reflecting back, how do you think the lesson went?”

Matthew: “I’m continuing to progress. I have been conferencing with K parents. I’m very happy with where we are now.”

Me: “What are your thoughts about the data?”

Matthew: “I’m happy with all of the N’s. I really need to stick with it!”

Me: “How did your lesson go in comparison to what you had planned?”

Matthew: “I felt that I stuck with my plan. I’m being more consistent. This has benefited the students as well as me.”

Me: “In what way?”

Matthew: “The lessons are going more smoothly. The teacher provides students with consistency. The teacher says this is going to happen and it does. I think it helps the students feel safe.”

This discussion data shows Matthews progression of being unsure how of how to handle the behavior situation, to taking charge of his most problematic group and finding success based on the changes that he decided to make.

The participants were asked to reflect on their experiences throughout the study. This allowed me to truly see the benefits of their coaching experience. As I reviewed the responses, I noticed that participants could pinpoint exact moments when their instruction change or when they can see how to change their instruction in the

future. For example, Claire had an interesting thought when reflecting about her teaching in regard to providing wait time in the large group setting. "I allowed much more wait time which led to a deeper understanding and held more students accountable. A specific example would be when Ben gave an incorrect answer and because I let him talk it through, he arrived at the right answer without my assistance."

A few participants even created teaching "to do" lists as they reflected on their instruction and our coaching conferences. This goes along with the reflective thinking that all the participants exhibited during this process. The "to do" lists and the other reflections are all directly related to their individual experiences with coaching. The reflective practice of coaching forces one to push thinking that correlates to the areas of need that the teachers themselves have deemed worthy of improvement. This empowering act is the heart of the coaching experience.

Benefits of a Nonjudgmental Approach

The teacher reflection journals gave me the ability to understand the participant's feelings during this process. A final theme that developed was the notion that coaching's nonjudgmental approach is beneficial to how staff members feel about being observed and receiving feedback.

In Sarah's response journal, she stated that, "I really enjoyed the feedback from Cognitive Coaching. It was nice to talk to talk things out with a peer in an unbiased way."

Matthew was excited for the opportunity to "receive feedback from a non-administrative perspective, thus [being] less intimidating. I feel like I am sharing and learning with a peer without the prospect of rubrics, Danielson models, and effectiveness ratings."

During the fourth week of the study, final reflection surveys were administered. When asked "*What do you see as the value of coaching?"* Matthew responded "I personally think it is a truly effective practice to improve instruction/management without the stress of an administrator watching everything and giving a score."

"How do you see coaching affecting my future reaching?" was another survey question, Linda noted, "I feel more confident to ask for assistance if I am struggling with something and would like some help in a positive, nonjudgmental way." I noted in my own reflection journal that I felt as if some staff members were gaining confidence, in particular Matthew and Linda. It was nice to read that my thinking was correct.

Joy and Sarah noted that they appreciate the feedback from a peer. Sarah admits that she had to get past the idea of being observed and having someone judge her. In the end, she sees the value of "talking out problems to find solutions for yourself." In my own reflection journal, I stated that "I believe Sarah signed up for coaching in order to overcome her fears of being observed. I see this as a positive. It shows her initiative in bettering herself as a teacher. This is especially important because it is her first year. She will need this support!"

Another entry made in my own research journal, was when I reflected on an experience I had outside of the coaching conferences. After school one day, I walked

into a room where two participants were having a conversation. I wrote, "I walked into a classroom after school today and two participants were talking about coaching! The conversation was positive. They were discussing what they were going to have me focus on next. They were also talking about how they enjoyed the process of having someone other than an administrator come in, observe, and provide meaningful feedback. They both mentioned that they wished we had common planning time in order to discuss these things. I can see that the teachers are really seeing all of the benefits of coaching. I can also sense their frustration in knowing that certain changes need to happen in order to keep this going."

After looking at my data sources, I found that coaching had an overall positive effect on the participants. Even though PLCs did not show a change over the course of this study, study activities provided participants with something to contemplate in terms of the effectiveness of PLCs and how PLCs can change in order to be more effective. This type of thinking that challenges the status quo in order to make needed changes can only be seen as positive if action does take place and student learning is then increased due to this change. A teacher changing their instruction based on what they have reflected on during coaching sessions is another positive. Not only have teachers been changing their teaching practices based on the data they received, they are sharing these experiences with others. This is a powerful start in changing the culture of collaboration in our school. Additionally, the participants were open to having a peer observe them as they teach and then meet in order to discuss what was found. They were able to identify this as nonjudgmental and were able to see the benefits of these types of interactions. I see this as a big change in how our school usually operates. The

participants are leading the way to a more open and collaborative setting. They have demonstrated that they are capable of working collaboratively in order to create changes that will impact the success of their students. The comments made in regard to student interactions, positive thinking, increased confidence, and awareness for transformation leads me to believe that participants will become agents of change in order to continue the experience they had with Cognitive Coaching.

Chapter five will summarize the study findings. Implications for creating more effective professional learning communities using cognitive coaching are discussed.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications for the Field

Summary

As my research concluded, I found that the experience of Cognitive Coaching has had a positive effect on the participants of this study. After spending four weeks engaging in coaching sessions and asking participants to be reflective about their experiences, I found that this study benefited the participants and the school by motivating staff members to become more reflective thinkers in order to change instructional practices, made participants more aware of the need for change in regard to Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings and staff planning time, and the process began building confidence and trust.

After the four weeks were completed, I found that the participants in this study changed their instructional practices based on their reflective thinking. Reflection journal entries, survey results, and my own observations showed that this was the most clearly present outcome at the conclusion of the study. All seven participants showed the ability to reflect on their teaching and then make decisions based on the visual data in order to change instruction. Participants decided that these changes were necessary in order to see a more desirable outcome from their students.

Additionally, the participants of this study were able to identify a dire need to change the way PLCs are conducted. This was evident in answers to survey responses. 71% of the participants interviewed identified that PLCs in the district are not

effective. This led to an understanding that in order for PLCs to become more effective, specific changes need to be made within the school.

Lastly, there is an overall positive reaction to coaching in the form of an increase in confidence and trust among staff members. This is linked to the positive reaction to the non-judgmental approach that Cognitive Coaching offers. Teacher reflection journals, staff surveys, and observation notes clearly show the transformations made by the majority of the participants. Many participants noted an increase in confidence. Trust was established in the form of the staff's initiative to acknowledge the areas in need of improvement and willingness to openly discuss these matters as the process progressed. Staff members saw that they had the ability to make instructional decisions within themselves. They also learned the benefit of learning with a peer.

Conclusions

After referencing the literature connected with Cognitive Coaching practices, Professional Learning Communities, and teacher collaboration, I found that my study findings coincided with what has been learned from previous research- The benefits of coaching came through in the conclusion of this study. Swafford's research shows that there was a prevailing theme linked to peer coaching benefits (Swafford, 1998, p. 55). One clear benefit is that teacher change was facilitated in terms of technical expertise, feelings about effectiveness of classroom instruction, and personal reflections about teaching and learning. Another theme is that coaching provided different lenses through which teachers could view their instruction. Peer coaching can build a professional culture that supports teachers who are knowledgeable and responsive to all

students, regardless of their needs (p. 57). These themes are present, in varied capacities, within my study.

A very important finding is that teacher instruction changed to fit student needs during coaching sessions. Research supports this notion. For example, Aguilar (2013) explains that coaching is linked to teachers' increase in using data to inform practice. "Effective coaching programs respond to particular needs suggested by data, allowing improvement efforts to target issues such as closing achievement gaps and advocating for equity." (p. 9). This was visible in individual teacher conferencing data.

The need for PLC changes was clearly evident during this study. Participants expressed a need to become more collaborative, have PLCs be directed by the teachers, and be given common time to allow for collaboration. Elena Aguilar (2013) describes how coaching relates to staff development meetings such as PLCs, "Coaching is an essential component of an effective professional development program. Coaching can build will, knowledge, and capacity because it can go where no other professional development has gone before: into the intellect, behaviors, practices, beliefs, values, and feelings of an educator." (pg. 8) Staff members showed positive progress towards these very elements when coaching was introduced.

Overall positive outcomes pertain to empowerment, confidence, and trust were components of the study findings, Garmston, Linder, and Whitaker (1993) offer candid information about teacher interactions and teacher autonomy leading one to look closely at the effect of coaching on teacher efficacy. Both Whitaker and Linder reported becoming better thinkers and, therefore, better teachers (p. 58). As a result of their coaching experience, they were able to encourage development of other peer

relationships within their districts (p. 61). These are the actions of confident and autonomous educators. Participants in this study began to show these qualities even within the timeframe of the study.

During a staff meeting which occurred after my study was completed, the school principal asked for opinions about the participants coaching experience. His question was a surprise to me- I had no idea that this was still at the forefront of his thinking, considering all of the important tasks that a school principal deals with on a daily basis. Three participants were eager to speak: Ivy, Joy, and Linda. I was extremely happy to hear the positive thoughts expressed by these participants. All three staff members mentioned the fact that this experience has made them a better teacher through reflective practice leading to a change in instruction.

Ivy: "I am more aware of my teaching. There's an increase in self-awareness and the reflective practice. I really liked that you select one thing to focus on. When you review the data, the next idea just comes to you."

Linda: "I am more conscious of the things that I was looking at. I feel more confident and I'm getting better."

Joy: "We picked what we wanted to focus on. It wasn't an observation or an evaluation. It was a way to see if there is a better way of doing something based on my own thinking."

An important thing to remember here is that Linda is a staff member who usually doesn't volunteer her thinking during staff meetings. My original research question really focuses on if a change in collaboration occurs through exposure to coaching

practices. Data that has been collected does not show significant change; however, it is moments like these that show the potential for such change if practice were to continue.

Limitations

A major limitation that affected the outcomes of this study would be the length of time in which research was able to be conducted. Each of the seven participants were only exposed to three rounds of coaching. Even though this was a great amount of work, I believe that staff members need more exposure in order to show significant gains in areas outside of personal improvement. Teachers did show success in regard to their own practice; however, more time needs to be dedicated in order to change an entire school culture.

Connected to the timing limitation is the issue of consistency. This study was conducted in November. This is a time of year where there are many days off, reduced days, and parent/teacher conferences. This became an issue when trying to schedule conferences and observations. At times, interactions began to feel disjointed because of the length of time between pre-conferences, observations, and then post-conferences.

Another limitation would be the inconsistency of PLC meeting formats. This has been a noted problem from participants of this study. I found this to be an issue when collecting data. Originally, data was to be collected during two PLC meetings, one before study participants had been exposed to coaching practices, and one after. During the final PLC observation, I was unable to collect data pertaining to participant interactions during the meeting. This was due to administrators turning the PLC meeting into a workshop on teacher evaluations and the new Danielson model adopted by the

school district. If anything, it does show proof of the necessity to change PLCs as they currently stand.

Implications for the Field

After analyzing the data collected throughout the study, I found a few areas that could be further investigated. One area in particular would be how the results would change if the study were to be conducted over a longer period of time. A significant issue with the short time frame of this study is that teachers may not see the full benefit in the form of student progress with such a short, disjointed coaching experience. Coaching clearly had positive effects on the staff. It would be interesting to see the improvement in student progress because of coaching practices.

A question which I plan to explore further is, "would greater gains be made in changing the culture of collaboration if coaching was used directly with PLC meetings?" I would like to work together with administration in order to create a version of the "Leadership Committee" that my principal had wanted before the beginning of this school year. This could very well be the change that so many staff members expressed a desire for. This may be easier said than done, considering the need for changes in scheduling in order to acquire common planning time.

This study could be improved if there was consistent support from administration. Using the study methods across a wider range of grade levels would surely be more beneficial based solely on the notion of the more people who participate, the more likely change would occur. This would require the support of administrators in all district buildings to not only be flexible with their time, but to also be flexible with their understanding about how successful collaboration is built. As a district in the midst

of changing mindsets and philosophies, it is difficult to say if this would be a difficult task or not.

In summary, Cognitive Coaching has emerged as a worthwhile endeavor. The use of coaching techniques can increase confidence and trust among staff members. It allows for a safe place for educators to share their reflective thinking without fear of evaluations, judgments, or point systems. Most importantly, it empowers educators to embrace changes needed in order to achieve best practices for greater student success. For my district in particular, it is one more step in the direction of change. As Paulo Freire (2005) once stated, "Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future." I believe our future needs Cognitive Coaching in order to fully transform into the collaborative culture we so greatly desire.

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Appendix A

Principal Survey

1. How would you rate the effectiveness of PLC meetings? 1 meaning “not at all effective” and 10 meaning “extremely effective.”

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Explain your rating:

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2. If you believe that meetings should change, what can be done to make them more effective?

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3. Do you believe that our PLC meetings follow PLC norms? Why or why not?

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4. Do you feel that all staff members participate equally during meetings? Explain.

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5. How would you describe staff willingness to work collaboratively?

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Appendix B

Initial Staff Survey

1. Do you prefer to work collaboratively or on your own when it comes to school activities/tasks? Why?

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2. How would you rate the effectiveness of PLC meetings? 1 meaning “not at all effective” and 10 meaning “extremely effective.”

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Explain your rating:

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3. If you believe that meetings should change, what can be done to make them more effective?

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4. Do you believe that our PLC meetings follow PLC norms? Why or why not?

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5. Do you feel that all staff members participate equally during meetings? Explain.

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Appendix C

Final Staff Survey

1. Please rate the effectiveness of Cognitive Coaching in relation to self-reflection.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Please rate the effectiveness of Cognitive Coaching in relation to instruction.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Please rate the effectiveness of Cognitive Coaching in relation to student learning.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. What do you see as the value of Cognitive Coaching?

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5. How do you see coaching affecting your future teaching?

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6. How do you see coaching affecting your future interactions in PLC meetings?

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7. Would you be interested in participating in Cognitive Coaching activities in the future? This could include coaching others as well as being coached by a peer.

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